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The Politics of Entropy

After more than a half dozen primary debates, several months of cable grazing, and assiduous reading of every political story I could get my hands on, I fear my concerns about global dumbing are more valid than I had initially realized.

Global dumbing, according to the thesis I have been considering lately, involves the virtually imperceptible but steady deterioration of the aggregate human mind -- as well as of its institutions -- much as the temperature of the earth is apparently rising at a rate so minuscule that scientists will be still be debating its escalation even as the waters of the Atlantic Ocean lap at the potted plants in the lobby of the Trump Plaza.

In fact, global warming and global dumbing are intimately connected. Without the latter, something actually might be done before that portion of Washington below the fall line of the Potomac is totally submerged. And like global warming, global dumbing concerns itself with losses incurred by energy transfers and nature's ceaseless quest for the random equilibrium of chaos. It is, in short, the entropy of the human spirit and of the systems it has created.

In physics, entropy is a measure of unavailable energy. In the natural world, entropy is reflected in the pollution from your car and the radioactive tailings from Seabrook. If the world were perfect, energy would do just what it was supposed to do

and not go wandering off like some groupie of that cosmic band, The Second Law of Thermodynamics. As it is, much of it is wasted and thus when you bake something, your kitchen as well as your oven gets warm. Such phenomena led the German physicist Ruldolf Clausius to propose in 1865 that we were losing energy everywhere and that we call this sorry state of affairs *entropy*. It's been downhill ever since.

Allow entropy go on long enough and you could theoretically have all energy transferred from where it is to a great hyper-heated toxic dump in the sky, with the result that the whole universe would just burn up. Fortunately, there is still debate about this.

Entropy causes enough problems as it is, such as the tendency in nature for things to move towards an equilibrium of disorder and towards a simple, inert state. Thus while we can easily burn wood in our fireplaces, no one has figured out how to take the ashes and turn them into a tree limb again, let alone recreate a whole rain forest. Information theorists say entropy goes on in communications as well. The repeated transfer of information results not in knowledge, they argued, but noise and static as the information degrades in its repetition, much as a fifth generation photocopy of a fax becomes unreadable.

Cultures lose energy, too. Which is why the Egyptians don't build pyramids any more, and why Guatemalans have to import digital watches rather than just checking their Mayan calendars. The creation of a great civilization or a great world power wastes a enormous amount of energy. As Barry Commoner put it, in nature there is no free lunch.

In earlier times, it was possible to avoid cultural entropy by stealing

energy from somewhere else. This, of course, was the foundation of slave trade, the British Empire and various new world orders of the first half of 20th century. While it still goes on, energy theft has become more difficult as the world has steadily lost its cultural, political, environmental and economic differentiation, not to mention the creation of OPEC and the appearance of nuclear bomb factories in various third world countries.

The global human mind faces a similar problem, thanks to such factors as the ubiquity of American film and television, excessively frequent summits of world leaders, international conferences on every conceivable subject, multinational corporations and other well meaning efforts that bring the world closer together but in so doing leaves no corner of it immune from human energy loss. If there is, in fact, a entropic collapse of the earth, the last sound may well be that of Larry King telling a caller from Bali to hold on a minute for a word from our sponsor.

George Bush, Saddam Hussein, and the perpetrators of the abortive Soviet coup are just three recent indicators of the increase in human entropy. But if it indeed is upon us, we can not count that it will always manifest itself with such clarity in time for us to take action. We must find ways to observe and measure its change wherever we find it.

Such as in a presidential campaign. If it were merely a problem of Republicans being dumb, we could not realistically describe this as a novel phenomenon. After all, the Republican Party has long been dedicated to entropy, constantly transferring energy from the ordinary citizen to its major campaign

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contributors, and totally indifferent to that which is lost along the way. For example, between 1977 and 1989, the income of the top 1% of the country rose 77% while the income of the bottom fifth declined 9%, with the entropy involved in this transfer causing a proto-depression throughout the land.

But now there seems little hope in the alternative, either. To be sure, a number of the Democratic candidates have produced lengthy documents as totems of their seriousness. But these are, to today's politician, as Marx was to the last of the Soviet communists. As an economist remarked to me the other day, Communism in the Soviet Union died years ago; we just didn't notice it because the Soviet leaders kept invoking Marx. Similarly, many American politicians still refer constantly to the Constitution. And some candidates repeatedly cite their 86-page plan.

In their day to day campaigning, on the other hand, the aspirants quickly get things down to a few basic concepts. Thus the Democratic candidates taught us the following this year:

Clinton: Middle-class good; allegations bad.

Tsongas: Business good; Santa Claus bad.

Harkin: Real Democrats good; George Herbert Walker Bush bad.

Kerrey: Future good; losing leg bad

Brown: Corruption bad; 800-lines good.

The worst in this regard was probably Tom Harkin who waddled along the campaign trail like the Everyready rabbit of liberalism. I started this season full of hope for the man, but within a few months was wondering if one inserted the batteries under his jacket on in the soles of his shoes.

To be sure, pidgin politics is not new. And the greatly increased access to the candidates, thanks particularly to C-SPAN and frequent debates, may have created a burden on the candidates's imagination and creativity that few politicians of any era could have withstood.

Still, we must also consider that we have had no ordinary set of candidates: of the original major five, four were graduates of law school (including two who went to Yale), one was a Rhodes Scholar, two were trained by the Jesuits, and all could probably beat John Sununu on Jeopardy. Thus, it is not unreasonable

to wonder why this campaign came down so quickly to one-liners, micro-ideas and policies that sounded more like listings in a book index than programs for a nation.

Even Tsongas quickly reduced his economic ideas to minimalist incomplete sentences:

"Twinkie economics. Tastes good. No nutrition."

"Cold War? Over. Japan won."

And here is an actual quote from the Hon. Jerry Brown on the Mexican-American free trade treaty:

"Clinton: jobs there. Brown: jobs here. It's real simple. Don't complicate this vote."

Clinton, while clinging to the most part to traditional English sentence structure, has become so bored with his own ideas that, when not stealing those of his opponents, he frequently merely recites them as if reading the ingredients off a cereal box, or dismisses them as a "package," as in "I have a whole package on urban problems," adopting the canon of the marketing industry that packages are more important than contents.

Clinton's rhetoric is a fine example of entropic exposition, designed to make one feel good without actually saying anything. The first rule in dealing with such language is to read it a second time. You will discover, if you do, that Clinton favors a construction something along these lines:

"We need a strong program/package/strategy to deal with the [problem] which has [caused the following bad things]."

The casual listener will assume, because Clinton seems to understand so well the problem and its effects, that he knows what to do about it. They will miss the semantic shell game created by the entropic use of the word *a*.

This little word, beloved by policy nerds, diplomats, congressional witnesses and others involved in wholesale facts evasion, conceals the complete lack of commitment to what the statement seems to be addressing. International crises have happily proceeded for years with diplomats periodically standing before the cameras and speaking of the "pressing need for a viable process," while carefully avoiding any description of what that process might look like.

The media, of course, could break through the plexiglas ceiling of political rhetoric, should it so desire. It could, for example, get Tsongas to

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really explain his position on nuclear power or Clinton to explain what is in his various "packages" or what his years in power in Arkansas have actually done for the citizens of that state.

Unfortunately, though, entropy has increased as much in the press as in politics. As in nature, the entropy of these institutions has led to a breakdown of the complex in search of a simpler form -- so simple, in fact, that lately a generic media/politics has developed exemplified by the former White House chief of staff who replaced a journalist on *Cross-Fire* so the journalist could run for president.

Even among journalists not running for anything, dumbing has become so dominant that it is considered a good thing. Hence the expression "dumbing down" for simplifying an article to the presumed intelligence of the readership. The *Washington Post* is particularly fond of this practice, even to the extent that in one story it explained to its readers what a truck axle was.

Like global warming, these

trends did not occur overnight. Some thirty years ago, while writing 9 news summaries a day for a radio station, I amused myself by choosing an underused polysyllabic word of the day and slipping it into as many newscasts as I could. It was less than two weeks before I got a memo from the news director telling me to stop.

But no one can listen to "electability" being cited for the 4203rd time as a major issue in this campaign without a profound sense of human energy loss.

Almost alone among his colleagues, John Tierney of the *New York Times* has at least broached the entropy issue. In his story on ABC's attempt to get the candidates to agree to spend 20 minutes of their debate actually debating and discussing the issues with one another without media intervention, Tierney recorded the reaction:

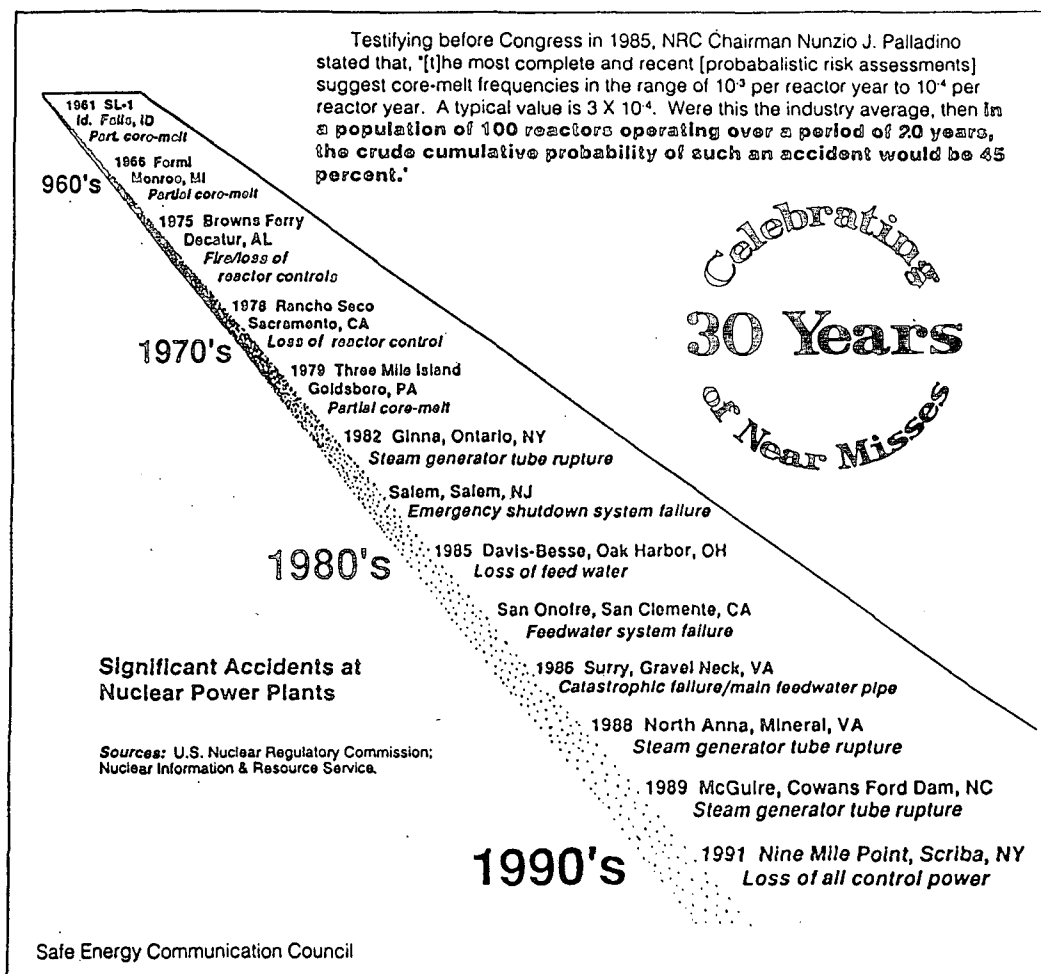
Conduct a debate? Press each other for answers? But this meant they would actually have to listen to other humans and ask questions. These skills tend to atrophy in powerful politicians. By the time they become presidential candidates

they have been pontificating for so long to so many captive audiences that they have lost the ability to carry on a polite conversation.

Since only Jerry Brown agreed to the idea, and some of the others threatened to walk out, ABC dropped the idea.

Nor is this entropy limited to the more public pursuits. Indeed, a cursory examination of American business suggests that its major product is wasted energy. Computer all the energy loss created by corporate lawyers, Washington lobbyists, marketing consultants, CEO benefits, advertising agencies, leadership seminars, human resource supervisors, strategic planners and industry conventions and it is amazing that this country has any manufacturing base at all.

We have created an economy based not on actually doing anything, but on facilitating, supervising, planning, managing, analyzing, tax advising, marketing, consulting or



defending in court what might be done if we had time to do it. The few remaining truly productive companies become immediate targets for another entropic activity, the leveraged buyout.

Things have degenerated so far, a recent article in *Business Economics* points out, that we even cite entropy as an indication of our economic progress, as when we add the cost of cleaning up the Valdez oil spill to our gross national product.

I am convinced that this is no small part of the foreign competition problem, for in countries where business entropy has not progressed so far, a higher percentage of commercial energy is spent doing something.

One might look to our universities for ways to counteract the entropy of our society. But one would do so in vain. In fact, one sure clue to the rate of entropy is relative inflation, for inflation, after all, is a measure of how much its costs to do the same thing today compared with yesterday. The difference is a form of entropy and at the top of the list you'll find academia.

It shouldn't really surprise when you realize that these campuses have been actually teaching the entropic lifestyle for years. It was America's business schools that spread the word that management was an overarching skill that eliminated the need to know anything about the particular product that was being managed. It was agricultural schools that fostered entropic farming with its emphasis on pesticides and capital intensiveness. And it has been our academies of the liberal arts that have so failed to guard our language that a majority of college graduates seem to think that having a "process" is the same thing as creating a product.

Scale plays an important role in entropy. Roughly speaking, the larger a system or institution, the more wasted energy. This applies to governments, corporate bureaucracies, or the limousines their leaders ride.

Part of this is due to the fact that as a system becomes larger a proportionately greater amount of energy has to be devoted to keeping the system alive rather than doing what the system is meant to be doing. Hence the college president who

spends 70% of the work day raising funds instead of raising academic levels, a phenomenon that can be noted at a mundane level by anyone who has moved from being a member of a committee to being its chair.

If you think about it, I am sure you can find in your own experience numerous examples of the increase in human entropy. An easy test is to write down all the institutions, committees or groups with which you have some affiliation. Now put a check mark beside each which is doing a better job now than it was five or ten years ago. See what I mean?

Applying this test to the entire decade of the 80s, I could only think of a few major exceptions such as laptop computers, Velcro and minivans, although, being as subject to global dumbing as everyone else, I may have missed something.

The problem of entropic systems is further complicated by the fact that nature didn't intend these systems to exist in the first place. So the bigger and more complex they become the more unnatural and unstable they become. Just as an ice cube would rather be water, the Resolution Trust Corporation would much rather be a bunch of political hacks handing out patronage to their Republican allies. Entropy drives these systems towards their natural state, resulting in not only ineffectualness and anarchy, but massive corruption as well.

Since everyone has forgotten what these systems are meant to do, it is no longer possible to determine clearly what those within them are meant *not* to do. Aided by the entropic use of language, our ethics as well as our productivity become degraded. Thus we find the mayor of Washington accepting scores of free tickets to the Super Bowl from Jack Kent Cooke, with whom she is engaged in intense negotiations over a new stadium, and the debate centers over whether the tickets represented "the appearance of a conflict of interest" rather than -- to use a pre-entropic phrase -- a bribe. Similarly, when Bill Clinton's wife represents Bill Clinton's S&L buddy before an Arkansas regulatory commission we now discuss whether it is "inappropriate" rather than whether it is an impeachable offense.

Entropy is the great hidden issue of this campaign. It is there in the overhead costs of our crazy health

system. It is there in the annual loss of energy equivalent to the Pentagon budget due to our failure to adopt sound conservation measures. It is there in the decline of American business. It is there in the massive corruption of the system, from BCCI to bounced checks on the Hill. It is there in the incredible waste of a whole generation of young black males whom we would rather lock up than employ productively. It is there in the broad consensus that nothing seems to work anymore. It is there in \$1-a-day tax cuts faking an economic plan and \$1000-a-campaign contributions parading as democracy. It is there in the increasingly childish rhetoric of our campaigns and in our own passivity in the face of it. And it is there in the increasingly likely possibility that we will have to choose between a Republican who doesn't know where he's going and a Democrat who doesn't care where he's going.

Only Jerry Brown seems to understand this and thus is the only truly anti-entropy candidate of either party. Yet, sadly, it must be said that even he is willing to give up his verbs for a vote.

Fortunately there is no evidence that global dumbing has entered the human gene pool. Nature, before people began fiddling with it, handled the problem rather neatly by regularly killing off the entropic and giving birth to new life and energy. I find considerable comfort in the fact that I have never seen a small child facilitate anything nor one enamored of process in any form. Instead, they like to make things, do things, laugh and sing. Thus I strongly suspect that we have just taught ourselves to be dumb and, however difficult, it remains possible to re-educate ourselves, even if it means going back to kindergarten to learn how.

In any case, it is impossible to overestimate the importance of this issue. If global dumbing is not halted, we may wake up one morning and find that no one in this country knows how to make anything anymore. We may discover our dearest friends and relatives in a catatonic state before the TV and the device won't even be on. When we call for help we may find that 911 has become an endless loop voice mail system from which one can never disconnect.

We may even, some day, elect a hologram as president -- and we'll be too dumb to realize it.

-- Sam Smith

The Weather Report

BCCI: The biggest scandal

Besides its financial enormity, the BCCI scandal is one of the biggest and broadest political scandals in American history. You would never guess this from press coverage, investigatory zeal or political debate.

As the author of one of several forthcoming books on the subject put it the other day, it "involves people in the highest places of our government. It is just unbelievable."

Asked who would be on his list, if he had the power of subpoena in the case, Larry Gurwin said, "I would start with Bush and his predecessors. It is an extremely broad scandal."

To date, there are few heroes in this story -- a handful of investigative reporters, former congressional aide Jack Blum, Senator John Kerry and Manhattan DA Robert Morgenthau.

Because this is a truly bipartisan scandal -- involving not only the Reagan and Bush administrations but such major Democratic figures as Bert Lance, and Clark Clifford, neither party has any political motive for pursuing the matter. Both leading presidential candidates are only a stone's throw from the BCCI scandal. For example, the chairman of the bank that financed Clinton's run for the presidency has direct ties to BCCI. And Bush's deputy campaign manager has earned more than \$200,000 for his firm by providing public relations services for the principal owners of BCCI.

The Senate banking committee, with oversight responsibilities for the BCCI affair, has hired a counsel whose firm formerly represented the bank. And the House of Representatives has employed as chief counsel for its October Surprise investigation -- a matter that significantly overlaps the BCCI case -- Larry Barcella, who once represented BCCI. Barcella was part of the BCCI legal team put together by

Clark Clifford and Robert Altman when the bank was indicted on drug-money laundering charges in Tampa in 1988. BCCI helped finance Iranian arms shipments that some believe were part of the October Surprise scam.

As for law enforcement and regulatory officials, they are now as busy covering up past indifference or impropriety as they are finding out new facts. The CIA, for example, seems to have been using the notorious BCCI subsidiary, First American, as a major money laundering facility. When Robert Morgenthau wanted to have a major BCCI figure picked up as a material witness, the FBI initially dragged its feet. The witness, who headed BCCI's Washington office, is now reportedly singing in New York City.

It now appears that those on the take from BCCI or involved in some way include major Washington law firms and scores of political figures.

A few publications have broken through the silence, including the *Wall Street Journal* and *Time*. And NBC's *Sunday Today* did a superb special on BCCI that received a "significantly larger response than you get for an average show" according to a network representative. Yet try to find a presidential candidate who even mentions the initials.

Star Wars:

The quietest scandal

We know it's difficult to keep track of all the malfeasance going on these days, but the enormous Star Wars hustle deserves a good deal more attention than it's gotten.

The media, to the limited extent it has taken note of this scandal, has concentrated on the Pentagon's attempt to get rid of the whistle-blower who has revealed the SDI mess: Aldric Saucier. While this is an important aspect of the tale, and is an early and important test of the whistle-blower protection act, the attack on Saucier is only a symbol of the problems he has tried to expose.

These, according to Saucier, have included:

- Ten billion -- yes, that *billion* -- in duplicative, often fraudulent and consistently wasted research, with probably an equal amount hidden in the black budget that is completely shrouded from congressional oversight.

- Hundreds of millions of dollars funneled to universities for 400 studies that have never been read, only to be destroyed to make more storage space available for more unread studies.

- A stunning lack of technological progress for all this expenditure. Says Saucier, "Over the last decade we have spent over \$30 billion on fancy, duplicative experiments costing \$400-500 million apiece, without strengthening our national defense. SDI has been a failure."

- Misleading statements to the press and Congress about such schemes as 'Brilliant Pebbles.'

Saucier, a civilian employee of the Pentagon, is one of the nation's top physicists in high tech programs for defense and space. He was a team leader on the project that took man to the moon.

So far the story hasn't made it much past the government page of the *Washington Post* or the op-ed page of the *New York Times*. Apparently, congressmen kiting paychecks is considered more newsworthy.

Just politics

The softball coverage of Clinton may be explained by the results of Henrick Hertzberg's straw poll of four dozen campaign reporters: they all said they'd vote for Clinton. You'll find it the March 9 issue of the *New Republic*.

The key question in a Clinton-Bush race would be which one is the biggest opportunist. Clinton is giving Bush a run for his money, with the former head of the Democratic Abandonship Council conveniently moving left to pick up black and labor votes on the primary trail. As Bob Borosage, Jesse Jackson's issue aide in 1988, put it: "You have to be a political junkie with a memory to remember that Clinton now is not how he positioned himself for the last four years. The irony is that Clinton is now using a major theme of fairness against Tsongas when fairness was the word the DLC was going to banish from the Democratic lexicon. The DLC said it was for growth and told people they had to stop talking about fairness. It's hilarious."

Meanwhile the current president of the DLC says of Clinton's straying from the Vichy Democrats's line, "We expect him to come back to his original message." Just like Bush. Read my exit polls. (Please turn to page 8)

Who's Who in Arkansas

Arkansas Development Finance Authority: Originally established to provide low cost housing loans, Clinton in 1985 converted it to an economic development agency, providing long-term loans to companies financed by tax-exempts. In a study of ADFA, Alexander Cockburn of *The Nation*, found that recipients "bear the aroma of Clinton's circle." According to **Larry Nichols**, the former ADFA employee fired by Clinton, you had to be wired to get a loan. Underwriters included **Stephens, Inc.**, the bond underwriting firm of **Jackson Stephens**. Recipients included a firm whose chief executive who subsequently faced cocaine charges and Park on Meter, which was represented by Webb Hubbel of Rose, Hillary Clinton's law firm.

Bakhsh, Abdullah Taha: BCCI investor who in 1990 doubled his interest in **Worthen National Bank** to \$10 million.

Clinton, Bill: Governor of Arkansas and presidential candidate.

Clinton, Hillary: Lawyer and governor's wife. She represented **Jim McDougal's S&L, Madison Guaranty**, as it successfully sought the right to issue preferred stock as a means of jacking up its cash to the required 3% of assets. The campaign claims Hillary Clinton just prepared a brief, but Susan McDougal recalls her coming in and drumming up the business. Said Susan McDougal to the *Post*: "The problem was finances, her finances." The S&L went bust and was taken over by federal regulators in 1989. Meanwhile the records of the land development company have apparently disappeared. Susan McDougal says, "Governor Clinton has the records. I delivered them to him. I took them out of the filing cabinets and gave to my brother, who took them to the governor's mansion."

Clinton's lawyers say they only have partial records. Hillary, prior to revelations about Madison Guaranty, maintained that she did not represent clients before the state government. She now says, "For goodness sakes, you can't be a lawyer if you don't represent banks."

Flowers, Jennifer: Alleged to have had a long-term affair with Bill Clinton. Also had the shortest affair with the media ever experienced by the alleged mistress of a major politician, thanks to the Clintomania of the press.

Lance, Bert: Georgia financier and aide to Jimmy Carter, now thoroughly embroiled in the BCCI scandal. Old friend of **Jack Stephens**, whose bank provided a \$2 million line of credit for the Clinton campaign. Stephens, says Cockburn, introduced Lance to **Agha Hassan Abedi**, the BCCI founder, and with Lance "steered Abedi toward **First American**." Stephens also introduced Lance to **Ghaith Pharaon**, another BCCler who would later buy the **National Bank of Georgia**.

Nichols, Larry: A Contra veteran hired by Clinton in 1988 as director for marketing for the **Arkansas Development Finance Agency**. When a reporter got wind of Nichols's Contra connection later that year, Nichols was abruptly fired by Clinton. He filed suit, among whose allegations were those concerning **Gennifer Flowers** that would subsequently attract national attention. After the story broke, Nichols was allegedly put under considerable pressure by **Buddy Young** to drop his claim. According to Alexander Cockburn, just 24 hours before Clinton was to seek expatriation on *Sixty Minutes*, "Nichols put his name to a statement crafted to discredit all his previous assertions."

Mena, Arkansas: Small town and airport reputedly a major center for drug importation. After the feds scrapped a five year investigation, the Arkansas state police were taken off the case. Clinton has refused a request from one of his own prosecutors to pursue the matter. Even after an Arkansas congress member got Congress to authorize money for the investigation, says Cockburn, "the money has been held up behind a wall of bureaucratic excuses in Little Rock."

McDougal, Jim & Susan: According to a *Washington Post* story on March

12, Jim McDougal and Clinton "were longtime friends whose relationship dated to the late 1960s," when they both worked for Senator Fulbright. "Although Clinton and McDougal were alike in many ways -- both loved politics, both were gregarious, energetic men with a storytelling flair -- McDougal was interested in making money while Clinton was obsessed with gaining political stature. McDougal was a deal-maker even in his twenties, putting together real estate ventures for Fulbright and a host of other Arkansas politicians." In 1978 the Clintons and McDougals bought a 230-acre tract with two loans. Clinton, who was running for state attorney general, got one loan (to cover the down payment) with no collateral. The second loan is collateralized by the land itself. Who paid the interest and principle is not clear. Nor is it clear where the money went from the sale of 42 lots -- 24 of which were made to Ozark Realty in 1985 in return for \$35,000 and a Piper Seminole airplane valued at \$30,000. None of these deals showed up on the Clinton's tax returns and, according to the *Post*, "aides said they do not know what happened to the plane."

Reed, Terry: One of a number of Arkansas Contra operatives, a former CIA asset who worked with Felix Rodriguez, an important Contra link to the CIA and then-Vice President Bush's office. Asked to take part in Operation Doration, under which planes and boats needed by the Contras "disappeared," allowing owners to claim insurance. Reed claims he refused, but his plane was removed while he was away. It was returned two years later, in 1987, but Reed was asked not to report it because it might have to be "borrowed" again. Reed had become aware that the Contra operation also involved drug-running and got cold feet. He also believed that large sums of drug money were being laundered by leading Arkansas bond brokers. Went to Rodriguez and told him he was quitting. As a defector, Reed became a threat to the Contra operation. For what happened next to Reed and his plane, see **Buddy Young**.

Rose law firm: Hillary Clinton's law firm. Successfully represented state corporate interests in getting Clinton and the legislature to relax state incorporation standards. Has gotten fees from the Clinton-appointed

Public Service Commission and the Arkansas Development Finance Authority. One of the oldest firms in the country, Rose represented the Little Rock School Board during the 1950s school desegregation battles.

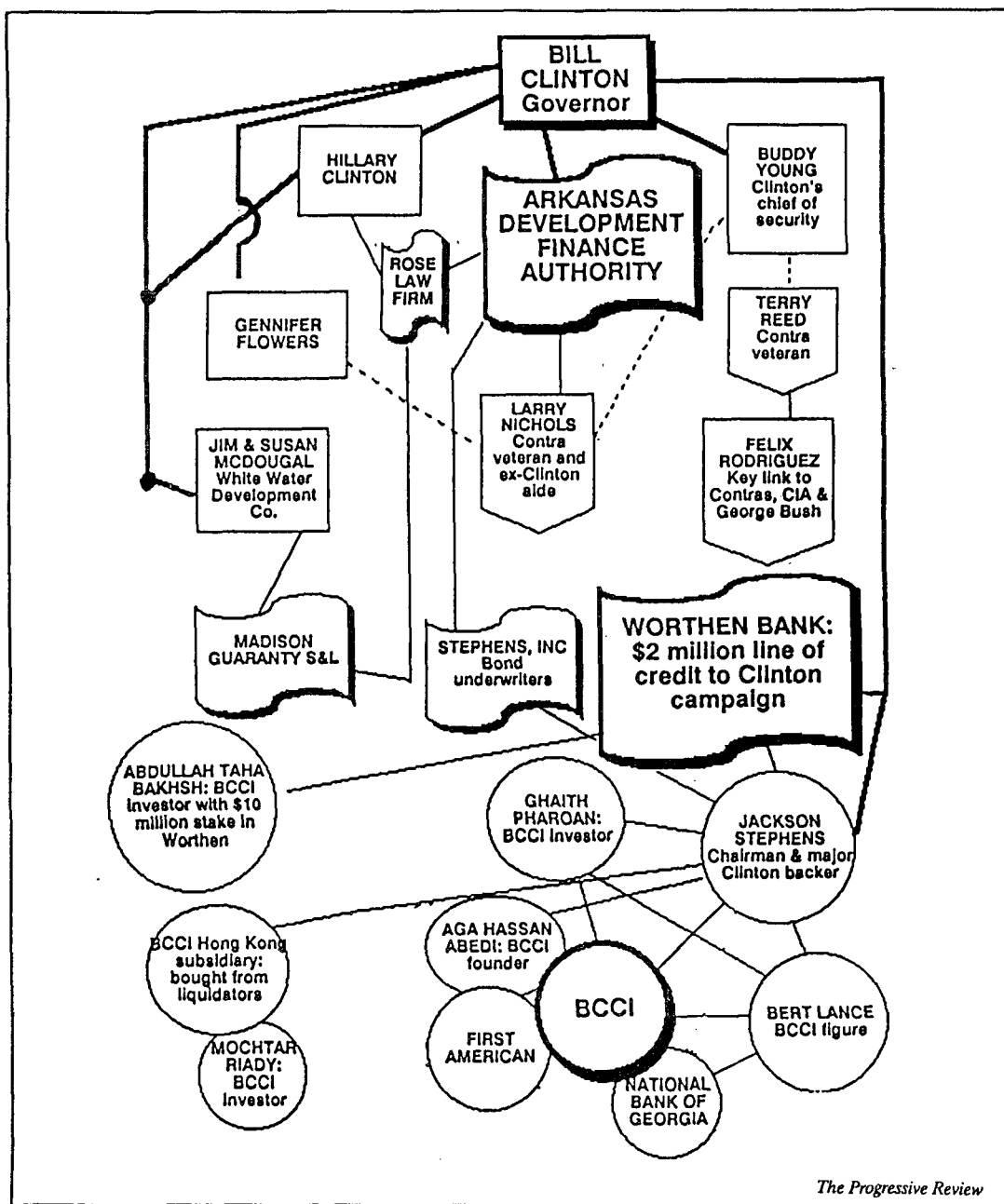
Stephens, Jackson: Board chair and controlling owner of Little Rock's Worthen Bank. According to the *New York Post*, Worthen extended a \$2 million line of credit to Clinton's campaign to get it rolling. The *Post* described Stephens, a Republican, as "the major financial backer behind" Clinton, who is "to Clinton what Bert Lance was to candidate Jimmy Carter." Stephens is a past business

associate of Bert Lance and BCCI figure Ghaith Pharaon. In 1991 Stephens joined BCCI investor Mochtar Riady in buying BCCI's former Hong Kong subsidiary from its liquidators. Meanwhile, the *Post* reported on February 7 that sources at Manhattan DA Robert Morgenthau's office said that they wanted to examine Worthen "for further ties to BCCI."

Young, Buddy: Chief of security for Bill Clinton. His efforts to get a Contra defector in trouble with the feds backfired last July when the court dismissed the case for lack of evidence. Alexander Cockburn in *The*

Nation reported in February that the judge had declared that Young and an associate had acted in "reckless disregard for the truth" in their case against Terry Reed which included entering Reed's hanger three times without a warrant, tampering with Reed's plane, hiding evidence useful to the defense in Clinton's mansion, and making false statements to a federal grand jury.

Sources: *New York Times*, *New York Post*, *Washington Post*, & *The Nation*. The best coverage of the real world of Bill Clinton has appeared in Alexander Cockburn's columns in *The Nation*.



Just politics cont'd

Another example of Clinton's cynicism is his repeated shoplifting of his opponent's phrases and ideas, a habit neatly summarized by the *New York Times's* Gwen Ifill in a March 17 story. Examples include swiping Kerrey's cry for "fundamental change," Harkin's call for increased attention to ethanol and his "real Democrat" line, and Brownesque anti-corporate rhetoric.

As relief from this dreary campaign, we watched a tape of an excellent documentary on Harry Hopkins the other night. Harry Hopkins, the Roosevelt aide whom Churchill called "Lord Root of the Matter," was brought to Washington by FDR to head federal relief efforts. Hopkins -- who believed there should be a decent job for every able-bodied American -- managed to find four million of them in just four weeks. So far as we could tell, he didn't even think about a middle-class tax cut. Something to keep in mind when you hear candidates talking about "the failed policies of the past."

Greens are starting to crop up not only on the ballot in the US, but in office as well. There's now a Green mayor in Cordova, Alaska; and Green councilmembers in Poestenkill and Woodstock, NY; Holyoke, MA; Missoula, MT; Madison, WI; Columbia, MO; Chapel Hill, NC and Gloucester, MA. A recent survey found about 30 Green office-holders, the most for any progressive third party movement since the Farmer-Labor parties of the 1930s.

Jerry Brown's flat tax got a boost from a surprising source: the editorial page of the *New York Times*. In an 'Editorial Notebook' column, Michael Weinstein said, "Mr. Brown is on to something wonderful." He credits the plan to Robert Hall, an economist at Stanford University, although in fact the idea has been around since the 1970s in progressive circles, but given little brief even there because of a misunderstanding of its effect on progressivity. Weinstein notes some of the positive attributes of the plan including simplicity, encouragement of savings, taxing all income only once, and tax returns that could be done on a postcard. Weinstein concludes:

"The Hall plan does, alas, embrace one flaw, almost certainly fatal. If passed it would create a small but

devastating form of unemployment: among the 56 members of the House and Senate tax-writing committees."

Land of the free

The FBI, worried that new digital telephone technology will hamper its wiretapping, has asked Congress to require telephone companies to design their systems so snooping can continue. The change would cost tens of millions of dollars, and the FBI suggests this be subsidized by a rate increase, i.e. asking that phone users pay for the privilege of being tapped.

The Senate witch-hunt for leakers in the Clarence Thomas affair is plowing new ground as it trashes reporters's First Amendment rights. Now it has subpoenaed phone logs of two of the leading journalists on the case.

The mediacracy

One of the saddest sights in journalism is that of a perceptive reporter turning into a flack of the conventional verities or a muezzin for the establishment. Thus it is with no joy that we note the decline of Cokey Roberts, the once fine voice of NPR, who has taken to smirking about Jerry Brown. Roberts has expressed her view that Brown is weird and noted after Brown virtually tied Tsongas in the Maine caucuses that something odd must be going on up there.

On another occasion, Roberts suggested that Brown's appeal was due to unfamiliarity and that those who have been around him longer, like the press, know him better. As one student of Roberts's descent notes, often her statements "are accompanied by little titters, laughs or a tone of voice dripping with disdain."

Maybe, though, Roberts is being led into bad ways by her colleague Kevin Phillips, who went so far on one broadcast as to label Brown's victories as "a sign of decay."

It's beginning to look like what this country needs is an alternative radio network.

On the other hand, that seems even less likely now that the Federal Communications Commission has proposed new rules that would allow a

single broadcaster to own up to three AM and three FM stations in the same market. The excuse is "a struggling industry," which will be familiar to those who recall the so-called "failing newspaper" legislation that freed newspapers from anti-trust laws and greatly encouraged the growth of print monopolies. Under the FCC's plan, in a market of fewer than 15 stations, the six-station formula would be permitted provided no such combination had more than 50% of the listenership. Cathy Hughes, a black broadcast owner in DC, told the *Washington Times*: "It's devastating to small owners like myself; it's devastating to African Americans and it's devastating to women."

Insight into the collective mind of journalism's extremist middle: The *Washington Journalism Review* polled a sample of its readers in its annual 'Best of the Business' survey. The *New Republic* was not only named as the best liberal magazine (beating out *The Nation* and *Mother Jones*) but almost won as the best conservative magazine (3 percentage points behind the *National Review*). *WJR's* reaction to this absurdity -- which it encouraged by nominating the NR in both categories: "Does this mean that *TNR* has achieved that journalistic balance we all are striving for?" The *Progressive Review*, just for the record, runs on the principle elucidated by its editor's Coast Guard navigation instructor: when you take a navigational fix and it puts you on one side of a rock and then you take another fix and it puts you on the other side of the rock -- don't split the difference. Find out where the rock is.

Drug busts

A psychomotor performance computer has been developed that takes less than a minute to evaluate a worker's responsiveness. The system, unlike urinalysis which only imperfectly determines past drug use and not alertness, actually tests for current impairment regardless of cause. Labor unions and the ACLU have endorsed the idea as an alternative to the odious urinalysis and the company that makes the system already has about two dozen clients. Info: Performance Factors, 980 Atlantic Ave #104, Alameda, CA 94501.

As pointed out here previously, the connection between AIDS, drugs

and sex in prison has yet to be studied closely. In a rare media look at the problem, however, the *Maine Times* has come up with the startling fact that 8.5% of new inmates in Massachusetts prisons were found to be HIV positive. Further only Vermont, Mississippi and three cities -- San Francisco, Philadelphia and New York -- provide condoms to prisoners. Vermont, with 784 inmates, hands out about 500 condoms a year. While the state won't reveal how many prisoners have AIDS, statewide, Vermont has only 94 cases for a population of a half million. Massachusetts has an AIDS rate more than four times that of Vermont -- 4149 cases.

While no one knows how much sex occurs in prison, the Vermont condom distribution stats suggests an absolute minimum. Applied to Massachusetts, for example it implies that there are at least 6000 unsafe sexual encounters yearly in its prisons, about 500 of which -- assuming a random distribution -- involving an HIV-positive partner.

These are figures from New England which has among the lowest incarceration and AIDS rates in the country. DC, for example, not only has a high AIDS rate but an incarceration rate about 12 times that of Massachusetts, fueled by the war on drugs.

The problem is exacerbated by heterosexual inmates entering prisons, engaging in same-sex sex, and then resuming a heterosexual lifestyle upon release. In short, prisons could be a major incubator of AIDS. No one knows and, worse, few seem to care.

The Swiss Supreme Court has reduced penalties for hashish sales, saying that the drug is no more dangerous than alcohol.

Four Texas county judges have called for cocaine cases involving less than a gram to be reduced to misdemeanors. About 15% of Harris County's drug docket consists of such cases.

A German judge has ruled that laws against possession of marijuana and hashish are unconstitutional. The judge declared that keeping alcohol legal while banning hashish and pot violated citizens's equality before the

law. The judge also called marijuana less dangerous than alcohol or 20 cigarettes a day. The decision has set off a major political debate in Germany and will be reviewed by a higher court later this year.

Just 7/100 of a percent of all accidents in the United States between 1972 and 1990 can be linked to drug and alcohol abuse according to a study by the Dayton Daily News. The newspaper's report was based on accident records obtained from OSHA.

The Naples, Fla., *Daily News* asked editorially last December: "Is it time to decriminalize (but not deregulate or decontrol) some so-called recreational drugs?" The paper noted the failure of the drug war as providing reason to examine alternative means of both curbing demand and removing profit from drug trafficking.

US District Judge James C. Paine has told the Federal Bar Association in

Saddam still has his job. Do you? --*Bumper sticker*

In Europe or Japan, when you pay your taxes, you get certain things. You get health care; you get free higher education. Here, you pay your taxes, what do you get? A whole pile of dead Arabs. and I don't know what to do with a dead Arab. --*A Whitney Brown.*

Bush is on the ropes and there's nobody else in the ring with him. He's just out there kicking the bejesus out of himself --*Dennis Miller*

Miami that the sale and use of controlled substances should be legalized. Said the veteran Florida jurist: "Alcohol didn't cause the high crime rates of the 20s and 30s; prohibition did. And drugs do not cause today's alarming crime rates, but drug prohibition does.

Bush family news

George W. Bush, the president's son, dumped \$846,560 worth of Harken Energy Corporation stock just one week before the company's earnings plunge was announced. Over the next six months, Harken stock went down more than 60 percent according to a report in *US News & World Report*. When Bush sold his shares, he was on a

committee that was studying the effects of Harken's restructuring in the face of creditor pressure. *USNWR* says that the company has been characterized by a pattern of "financial deal making so burdened with debt and tangled stock swaps" that its largest creditors have threatened to shut it down and analysts have "all but given up tracking it." Meanwhile the questionable deal -- under which Harken won the rights fo Bahrain offshore oil finds against more stable bidders -- has so far failed to pay off. The first of its wells came up dry in February.

Mother Jones, in a story by Stephen Pizzo, reports that Neil Bush formed his first oil drilling company in 1983, on a personal investment of \$100. His partners put \$160,000 into JNB Exploration and Bush was named president. He bailed out in 1989, leaving the partners to deal with the company's debts. Meanwhile, Silverado Banking, where Bush was a paid director from 1985 to 1988, loaned his JNB partners \$132 million, which they never repaid, and Silverado failed at a cost to taxpayers of \$1 billion.

Just days after walking out on JNB, Bush started Apex Energy on a personal investment of \$3000. The rest of the money -- \$2.7 million -- came from a Small Business Administration program designed to invest in "high risk start-up companies." Apex was no more successful than its predecessor. Bush bailed out in April of last year, after collecting \$320,000 in salary plus expenses.

Three months later, cable-TV magnate Bill Daniels, who has been lobbying President Bush not to regulate the cable-TV industry, offered Neil a job. According to a representative, Daniels "thought Neil deserved a second chance."

The *Wall Street Journal* reports that two of the president's sons have been named as possible witnesses in a class-action suit against BCCI. George makes the list because of his role in Harken, and Jeb had a Miami company that was controlled by a major BCCI borrower.

Clarence Thomas update

If you weren't disgusted enough by what you know already about how the way the Clarence Thomas confirmation hearings were handled, pick up the March issue of *Spy* magazine. In it, Lynda Edwards tells how Sen. Joseph Biden caved in to White House threats -- coordinated by C. Boyden Gray -- to portray Biden as a racist. It had worked once before and the White House enforcers reminded Biden of this by plopping down a brown folder on his desk filled with editorials -- such as the one headlined "The Next Lynching," -- that the Bushies had planted when Biden had stalled on Thomas's 1990 nomination to the US Court of Appeals.

Edwards also shows how the corroborating testimony of Angela Wright got torpedoed along with corroboration of Wright's testimony by another woman Rose Jourdain, who was never called to testify.



Furthermore

The National Toxics Campaign Fund reports that some 37 percent the nation's total reported chlorofluocarbon-113 emissions come from the US military. NTCF estimates that the Pentagon is indirectly responsible for nearly two-thirds of the nation's ozone-destroying chemical release when defense contractors are included.

During the Iraqi massacre, the Pentagon boasted of a "launch success rate" for its Tomahawk missiles of more than 95 percent, a claim faithfully spread by the media. Now it turns out that a successful launch, by Pentagon standards, is one in which the missile doesn't get stuck in the launcher.

In one of those stories on misleading statistics, the *New York Times* gave the example of three different UN indexes of human development under which the US ranked respectively 7th, 9th and 10th. What it didn't point out, however, was that according to all three indices Canada, Norway and Sweden were ahead of the US, and on two of the three so were Japan and Switzerland.

Field notes

Project Censored has published a book on the top twenty-five most censored news stories of 1991, including comments by journalists who tried to get the story out. The book is available for \$15 from the project at Sonoma State University, Rohnert Park CA 94928. Project Censored has also started a national newsletter, America's Censored Newsletter, which is available for \$30 a year from Censored Newsletter, PO Box 310, Cotati, CA 94931.

The Gaia Atlas of Green Economics: This is a valuable addition to the bookshelf of anyone concerned with creating an economics in which people and the environment matter. Clear, jammed with data, and fascinating to browse through. \$15.95 in paper from Anchor.

If You Love This Planet: Helen Caldicott, co-founder of Physicians for Social Responsibility, turns from the arms race to the race to save the planet in this new book out this month from W.W.Norton. [\$19.95]

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